



Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 105th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, July 30, 1997

Senate

s8305

INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM ACT

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to rise in support of the compromise amendment to S. 39--the so-called tuna-dolphin bill.

In forging this bipartisan agreement, we have struck a proper balance between resolving the market access problems now faced by other countries and keeping the faith with American consumers. It is a fair deal.

In short, the bill implements an international dolphin protection regime--known as the Panama Declaration--while maintaining the current dolphin-safe label during the pendency of a study on the impacts on dolphins from purse net tuna fishing.

In March 1999--after scientists have preliminary determined whether purse net tuna fishing harms dolphin stocks--the Secretary of Commerce is to make a determination as to the appropriate dolphin-safe label, whether that be the current one that Senator Boxer and I wrote into law in 1990, or another protective version. This decision will be reviewed in the year 2001.

Also included in the bill are provisions requiring Latin and South American countries tuna fishing the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean to enroll in an expanded dolphin protection program, which includes on-board observers. This will enable us to lock-in and improve upon the tremendous gains that we have already made in decreasing dolphin mortalities.

This amendment represents a compromise on process, not a cave-in on principles. Again, we retain for every letter of the current dolphin-safe label. In 2 years' time the question will be if the label should be changed--not when it should be changed.

I would also note that I do have some reservations regarding the adequacy of the data that will form the basis of the March 1999 label review. Only one population survey will be available at that time; this will not be an abundance of information upon which to make an informed and unbiased decision. I urge the Secretary of Commerce to err on the side of caution during the preliminary review and not make science conform to political will.

I would like to recognize and publicly thank my colleagues who worked so hard in crafting this agreement, particularly Senator Boxer, Senator Kerry, Senator Breaux, Senator Snowe, Senator McCain, and Senator Stevens. Each spent a great deal of personal time trying to bridge the gap in this debate, and I am grateful for their efforts.

In closing, this agreement continues to protect dolphins while keeping our faith with the American people. It is environmentally and economically the right thing to do, and I urge its passage.